

Sermon prepared for Grace Church on Revelation 3:14-22 by Jonathan Shradar

We arrive at the conclusion of our series this morning - Dear Church - the study of the letters of Jesus to the churches in Asia in the Book of Revelation. We have seen the ideal, the churches that earn praise from Christ, that have kept him at the center of their lives, and churches living under the pressures of life some missing the point and others skipping off in the wrong direction.

Today we land on a church that has nothing to praise. They might assume they do, but they hear nothing of the sort from Jesus. And I think more than the other churches, we arrive at one that matches our culture and the way we are taught to think!

In study this week I was drawn back to my karaoke days... A song that is nearly more American than apple pie: Frank Sinatra "I did it my way." This is a song declaring self-sufficiency, his way of life.

"For what is a man, what has he got?
If not himself, then he has naught
To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels
The record shows I took the blows and did it my way
Yes, it was my way"

This is a song that is a global sensation - world leaders play it at retirement parties - and it tops the ratings of songs played at funerals. All because it speaks to the human mentality we see fully exposed in the final letter from Jesus to his churches. The self-made person they are the ideal. But does this jive with the image we bear, with what we were purposed for - or is there something better.

The One who conquers exchanges self-sufficiency for Christ's sufficiency.

Revelation 3:14-22

Laodicea - the city of abundance and affluence. A banking center, known for its fine textile manufacturing and the shiny black fabric that was all the rage! This is the city with medical community respected for its focus on healing and caring for the eyes. This is a city with theaters, a stadium and opulent structures. This was also a city of great infrastructure. And they needed it to survive. Aqueduct to bring in fresh water.

They didn't let it get them down. They did it their way. When a devastating earthquake hit in 60AD the city refused financial assistance from Rome.

Bad water. Big banks. Stylish garments. Eye doctors. This is where the church resides. Jesus speaks to them as they are, and he speaks to the needs they have.

Given the enormous affluence of our own culture, we need to hear what Jesus says to the church in Laodicea. We need to be shown that the wealth of our culture does not meet our deepest needs.

As we walk through the letter we want to contrast the way of self and the way of Christ, then finish by thinking about the One making claims in this letter.

1) The Way of Self

3:15-17 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! [16] So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. [17] For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

The first things we should notice as unique in comparison to the other letters we have studied is that there is no commending here. Jesus has found nothing to encourage them on, to praise them for. He doesn't say “you have great doctrine,” or “your works are getting better” ... he has nothing to say other than diagnosis of the problem in the church.

The church is tepid in relation to Christ and it is due to their self-sufficiency. They rally around their wealth, their prosperity and they declared themselves as plumb out of need. There is a deep self-righteousness going on in Laodicea that says “look at all we own and have done - We have earned it and what more could you give us that we haven't already achieved...”

When just last week we saw the church in Philadelphia keeping the words of Christ, which we discovered by looking at John's Gospel were receiving, believing, asking and abiding - this church has none of that and quite the opposite. There is no receiving of the good news of Jesus or of empowerment of the Spirit because they have all they think they could ever want - their economic standing has delivered it. Their belief is not in the Savior but in themselves and their own ability. They never ask, they never petition the Lord for anything because they never have a sense of need on any level. And they abide or remain in their own self-sufficiency rather than Christ's. They did it their way!

Perhaps you would walk into a gathering of the church of Laodicea and be stunned by the exquisite fashion and the elegance of the people. This is a people that will tell you they have it all together - only perfect people allowed because in Laodicea there are no imperfect people.

We know this mentality don't we? We exist in the midst of it most of our days. The world says we have all we need in ourselves and rejects anyone that suggests there are deeper unmet needs. Credibility is based on success and the way someone has “prospered.” Comfort is found in the disposable income and the technology or toys it affords. All sense of arrival, belonging and self-worth is defined by the digits in the bank account or the audience we have accumulate or the opportunity to get more.

We look to mostly good things to solve spiritual realities that we ignore or claim don't exist. Working hard is not bad - but when it translates into my defining worth then it is. Wealth is not bad - but when it is my hope and the god I worship it is. Morality is not bad - but when we are convinced that it is earning us salvation it is of no worth at all. In this way, Laodicea is not all that different from the way I often approach, or don't approach Jesus.

“When you sense a hope, an anticipation, that your life is about to get better, what provokes that hope? Is it the thought of having more money, or is it the thought of having more of Jesus? Do you think that more cash will make you more happy, or do you think that a deeper understanding of God's character, of the humble servant way of Jesus, of the wise plan that God is infallibly bringing to pass will increase your joy? Do you want more financial security, or do you want to see more of God's splendor so that you'll be more confident in God?” Hamilton

It doesn't have to only be money: politics, approval, relationships. The way of self, finding hope in what we have, what we can gain, in what we can achieve. This is what is going on in Laodicea, they are putting their hope, their confidence in themselves.

Their abundant physical and economic resources have dulled their sense of need for God and the gospel, they resist the gospel because they are already too full to be filled.

And Jesus reveals the truth, that they are actually “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.” They are the exact opposite of what they think of themselves.

“When we boast we do so to create a self-esteem résumé to desperately fill our sense of inadequacy and emptiness.” Tim Keller

In this boasting, the church has failed to find in Christ the source of all true wealth, splendor, and vision.

Like those which Paul speaks about in **Romans 10:3** “For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.”

It has made them lukewarm. Youth group! Hot or cold - Jesus is relating their relationship with him to how we might want water - we usually desire our water to be either hot or cold - depending on the application.

Result - the church is spit out of his mouth, is rejected by Jesus - as they have rejected him. They remain in their poverty, blind and naked in their shame.

Jesus outside the church wanting in... “Behold, I stand at the door and knock...”

The way of self delivers something quite different than what we hope - however well it attempts to mask our need. It delivers separation from the One that can Save...

This makes them no church at all...

Yet even Laodicea has a chance. The fact that he rebukes her shows that he still loves her. "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline..." in this correction, Jesus gives a better way.

2) The Way of Christ

3:18 "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see."

Jesus is calling the church to leave off their attempts to clothe themselves. To give up their self-sufficiency and instead let Jesus provide for them.

Here he is calling the church to hear from him, "counsel," then to receive his grace for them. In their spiritual need, the church hears the words of Jesus, they are reminded of his kindness and sacrifice that gives them the gift of righteousness - an unconditional grace poured out on those that are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.

And in this grace the poor are given the ability to "buy" - This is Jesus saying you can never earn these gifts but I will equip you to "purchase" them by my grace.

Isaiah 55:1 "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Jesus says to the church, "exchange your self-sufficiency... stop your vain declarations... recognize your need and run to me. Open your door to me that we may dine together." Sharing spiritual food and the provision only he can give. And this is meant to be an ongoing experience because on this side of his return we remain in need.

Unless we consciously, explicitly remind ourselves of our need, we will slip into thinking that we are doing pretty well. Perhaps you recognize your need for the gospel and you embrace Jesus as your hope on the last day, but when you think about overcoming sin you think about what you can do rather than what Jesus can do. We need Jesus to stand against temptation just as much as we need him to stand before God at the last judgment. And this is trading our self-sufficiency for Christ's sufficiency.

This exchange is the better way - it is the way of true wealth. It results in gold refined by fire, untainted worth. It brings a richness beyond our dreams! It brings pure garments to clothe us in his righteousness, to cover our shame, our nakedness, our sin. Our own attempts fail, only Jesus

can cover our shame and nakedness. This exchange brings vision, anointed with his salve of grace, we can see the things of value, our purpose and the greatness of the gift we have been given. We can have eyes to see that change how we live, what we run after, what we convince ourselves will be worthwhile, what we invest in, who we are called to raise up and love.

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What great benefits to embracing Christ's sufficiency, wealth, covering, vision! But there is more!

3:21 "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."

1 John 5:5 "Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

So those that believe in Jesus, will sit with him on his throne - they will share in his reign and the joy of his accomplished victory. This is both a now and then reality. We will reign with him and now we are with him spiritually, as Jesus reigns at this very moment.

Ephesians 2:4-7 "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

The way of self says earn it, strive and hope in lesser things. It attempts to hide our need and is really self-deception.

The way of Christ is bringing our need to him in exchange for his sufficiency. And receiving the gift of his grace that gives us true wealth, strength, covering, vision and a place with him.

This is not merely a change of strategy or a gloss to make our self-sufficiency to shine more... this is the embrace of the one who knocks..

3) He Who Knocks

3:14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation."

The Amen - the final word, the lasting word. He is the faithful and true witness, he gives honest account, he calls it like it is and he is to be trusted. And he is the beginning, the originator of God's creation.

Jesus is no mere guru, he is the God of the universe. The only God... the One that pours out his wealth for those that bear his image. The One who makes a way of reconciliation, who substitutes himself in death to meet the wrath sin earned.

The One that loves you enough not only to call you out for living under your own attempts at sufficiency but to give you his righteousness, his place, his inheritance, his power, his grace.

Response: What then is the church in Laodicea to do; what are we to do in response to Christ's words?

Be zealous and repent - Fervently turn from self-sufficiency and turn to Jesus. This is realizing our need, our brokenness and then embracing the sufficiency of Christ. Keep coming back to Jesus and his gift of grace.

“To the degree you can shed the 'unreality' of self-sufficiency, to that degree your prayer life will become richer and deeper.” Tim Keller

“I am done trying to convince myself I have no need. Jesus move in my life, give me vision to see how you are working and how you want me to respond to you.”

In repentance, **open the door** - The question for the church is whether she will open the door and let him in again. For the only cure for lukewarmness is the re-admission of the excluded Christ. This is letting Jesus be the center of his church and of your life. Let him invade every area, every moment of your life. Give him run of the place!

Some of us may open the door to Jesus for the first time today. When Christ says “if any man...” he is appealing to the individual as well as the church. Today, trust in Jesus. Hear him call you his own, justified, covered. Let him in. Be reconciled to God.

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“Christianity isn't for everyone” By Chad Bird

“Let's face it, Christianity is not for everyone.

If you've made such huge strides in holiness that you deem grace a crutch for those still handicapped by sin, if you detect the faint applause of angels clapping their wings at your obedience, then you'll feel like you're slumming in Christianity.

Jesus calls poor, miserable sinners, not those who sport homemade halos.

If you've clawed, rung by rung, up the ladder of life. And if you now look down your nose on the masses of good-for-nothings who'll never be your peers, then you'll have no use for Christianity.

Jesus is the God of failures who bled between lawbreakers.

If you've walled yourself in so you don't have to rub shoulders with people that could use a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on, a handout now and then, a listening ear, a whispered prayer, then Christianity will be a turnoff.

The God who calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves will seem hopelessly out of touch with your insulated life of self-sufficiency.

If you smile at the man in the mirror because by not smoking and drinking and womanizing and gambling and swearing, you've built up a moral bank account so fat with cash you could open a pawn shop of piety and lend out your righteousness to others, then you'll be scandalized at the Father who sprints like a madman to throw his arms around the neck of the returning prodigal.

Yes, Christianity is not for everyone.

But if, rich or poor, you realize that your moral bank account is penniless, that you have no righteous riches to fill the wallets of others, much less God, then let me tell you about the God who, though he was rich, for your sake became poor, that he might enrich you with golden blood minted in divinity's veins.

If you're at the end of your rope, if the dark walls are closing in, then let me tell you about the God who knows you as one important and precious to him. He has a crazy, wild love for you.

He smiled at death and said, "Take me," in order that he might take you in his arms, make you alive, and love you back into hope again.

If you're lost, hurt, guilty, trapped, and can't seem to do a thing about it; if you're basically happy with life but still feel a biting hunger within you that no earthly delight can satisfy; then Christianity is for you.

Christianity is Jesus, the God of flesh and blood, who is looking at you even as you hear these words. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I forgave you before you even knew you needed forgiveness; died for you even before you were born; rose for you even before you knew you were dead and needed my life. I am your God—all yours—and you are my child—all mine. That's Christianity. It's all gift, and that gift is Christ for you."

The One who conquers exchanges self-sufficiency for Christ's sufficiency. May it be so with us.